



**SHALOM HARTMAN מכון  
INSTITUTE שלום הרטמן**

## **Identity Politics**

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iEngage Global Online Class  
June 9, 2020

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## **1. Working Definition of 'Identity Politics'**

*Group based political identity most often rooted in one's racial, ethnic, sexual, religious, cultural or gender identity. Unapologetic affirmation of one's heritage.*

### **I. Equal Rights for All is Good for the Jews**

## **2. Emma Lazarus, *The New Colossus*, 1883**

...“Keep, ancient lands, your storied pomp!” cries she  
With silent lips. “Give me your tired, your poor,  
Your huddled masses yearning to breathe free,  
The wretched refuse of your teeming shore.  
Send these, the homeless, tempest-tost to me,  
I lift my lamp beside the golden door!”

## **3. Bnai Brith, Anti-Defamation League Founding Charter, 1913**

OBJECT: The immediate object of the [Anti Defamation] League is to stop, by appeals to reason and conscience, and if necessary, by appeals to law, the defamation of the Jewish people. Its ultimate purpose is to secure justice and fair treatment to all citizens alike and to put an end forever to unjust and unfair discrimination against and ridicule of any sect or body of citizens.

## **4. Rabbi Joachim Prinz, selection from a speech delivered at the March on Washington, 1963**

...When I was the rabbi of the Jewish community in Berlin under the Hitler regime, I learned many things. The most important thing that I learned under those circumstances was that bigotry and hatred are not the most urgent problems. The most urgent, the most disgraceful, the most shameful and the most tragic problem is silence.

A great people which had created a great civilization had become a nation of silent onlookers. They remained silent in the face of hate, in the face of brutality and in the face of mass murder.

America must not become a nation of onlookers. America must not remain silent. Not merely black America, but all of America. It must speak up and act, from the President down to the humblest of us, and not for the sake of the negro, not for the sake of the black community but for the sake of the image, the idea and the aspiration of America itself...

## II. Identity Politics are Good for the Jews

### 5. Marc Dollinger, *Black Power, Jewish Politics, Reinventing the Alliance in the 1960s*, 2018

In early 1969, [High school] students in Minneapolis, Minnesota, responding to Afro-centric messaging, offered their principal a list of eleven demands that sought to communicate what a Black Power movement would look like if it were framed in Jewish terms. With a flair for the dramatic, students insisted that “all school books shall be read from right to left” in order to align with Hebrew-language binding. They asked that “all food dispensers shall issue only kosher food” and that “separate dispensers shall be provided for meat and dairy dishes.” In a play on the tradition of the Jewish bride circling her groom seven times during the wedding ceremony, students threatened that, should their demands go unheeded, “the Jewish students will march seven times around the school building, sounding the *shofrot* [ram’s horns], until the walls will cave in, as they did in Jericho.” If “Black was beautiful,” then, as their petition concluded, “Being Jewish is beautiful,” too (p. 119).

Jewish leaders saw in Black Power an opportunistic moment for their own communal priorities. During a 1969 gathering on black-Jewish relations, for example, Reform rabbi Israel Dresner suggested that Jews could “benefit from the sudden thrust of the black people” and asked, “Why do we condemn black kids who suddenly wear their hairdo African or wear African clothing?” In the rise of black ethnic and racial awareness, Dresner saw the possibility of “suddenly tomorrow, a million American Jews” walking “into their white-collar jobs wearing a *kaputah*, a beard, and a *shtreimel* [referencing traditional Jewish dress and appearance]” (p. 105).

As Donald Feldstein, an education consultant hired by the National Jewish Welfare Board to study college-age Jews, reported in 1970, “It is no longer embarrassing or ‘out’ to belong to a group on the college campus with the word ‘Jew’ in the title.” He noted “literally scores” of Jewish groups forming on college campuses across the country with “aggressively Jewish” missions that imitated “the spirit, the style, and the tactics of the New Left and black militants” (p. 112).

6. Norman Podhoretz, "Now, Instant Zionism," *New York Times Magazine*, February 1974

...the Hillel Foundation, which for 50 years has been operating Jewish student centers on several hundred American campuses, now reports that nothing in its entire experience "prepared it for the massive and unprecedented response by Jews on campus in the October war." This response was not only massive; it also "astonished Jewish communal leaders by its intensity" as measured by student contributions of more than a million dollars to the Israel Emergency Fund "and the rush of some 25,000 Jewish students to register as volunteer agricultural workers on Israeli farm settlement."



Yet even the magnitude and intensity of student response were as nothing compared with the explosion of support from the American Jewish community as a whole. According to the polls, a staggering 99 percent of all American Jews supported Israel. To express this support, they could send telegrams and letters and delegations to Government officials, and they did; they could sign ads and petitions, and they did; surgeons could volunteer their services to treat wounded Israeli soldiers, and they did.

But most people had no such useful services to offer. What most people could most effectively do was give money, and they did—more of them and more of it than ever before in history. What a leader of Baltimore Jewry said of the Jews of his own city was true of Jews everywhere in America: "There was an unbelievable reaction of the Jewish community to the war. I've been in fund-raising 43 years and I've never seen such an outpouring."

**7. Letty Cottin Pogrebin, *Deborah, Golda, and Me: Being Female and Jewish in America*, 1988, p. 119–20**

...I have come to feel that the holiday is incomplete without the all-women ritual that I have attended on the third night of Passover every year since 1976.

Why is this night different than all other nights?

Because on this night, twenty to thirty women sit in a wide circle on pillows on the floor with a cloth spread like a table before us, and we ask the Four Questions of women. On this night, for a change, we speak about the Four Daughters, female archetypes yearning to know their past. And on this night, the goblet usually set aside for the prophet Elijah belongs to the prophet Miriam...

On this night, one by one, we name our mothers and grandmothers, the women who cleaned, cooked, and served at family seders while the men reclined against their pillows retelling Jewish history - *his* story, the story of Jewish men.

On this night, we give *her* story equal time...

**8. Soviet Jewry Rally in San Francisco 1983, Simchat Torah (American Jewish Historical Society)**



### III. Is 'What is Good for the Jews' Good for Other Minorities?

#### 9. James Baldwin, "Negroes are Antisemitic because they are anti-white," 1967

... It is galling to be told by a Jew whom you know to be exploiting you that he cannot possibly be doing what you know he is doing because he is a Jew. It is bitter to watch the Jewish storekeeper locking up his store for the night, and going home. Going, with *your* money in his pocket, to a clean neighborhood, miles from you, which you will not be allowed to enter. Nor can it help the relationship between most Negroes and most Jews when part of this money is donated to civil rights. In the light of what is now known as the white backlash, this money can be looked on as conscience money merely, as money given to keep the Negro happy in his place, and out of white neighborhoods.

One does not wish, in short, to be told by an American Jew that his suffering is as great as the American Negro's suffering. It isn't, and one knows that it isn't from the very tone in which he assures you that it is.

For one thing, the American Jew's endeavor, whatever it is, has managed to purchase a relative safety for his children, and a relative future for them. This is more than your father's endeavor was able to do for you, and more than your endeavor has been able to do for your children... Furthermore, the Jew can be proud of his suffering, or at least not ashamed of it. His history and his suffering do not begin in America, where black men have been taught to be ashamed of everything, especially their suffering.

The Jew's suffering is recognized as part of the moral history of the world and the Jew is recognized as a contributor to the world's history: this is not true for the blacks. Jewish history, whether or not one can say it is honored, is certainly known: the black history has been blasted, maligned and despised. The Jew is a white man, and when white men rise up against oppression, they are heroes: when black men rise, they have reverted to their native savagery. The uprising in the Warsaw ghetto was not described as a riot, nor were the participants maligned as hoodlums: the boys and girls in Watts and Harlem are thoroughly aware of this, and it certainly contributes to their attitude toward the Jews.

But, of course, my comparison of Watts and Harlem with the Warsaw ghetto will be immediately dismissed as outrageous. There are many reasons for this, and one of them is that while America loves white heroes, armed to the teeth, it cannot abide bad niggers. But the bottom reason is that it contradicts the American dream to suggest that any gratuitous, unregenerate horror can happen here. We make our mistakes, we like to think, but we are getting better all the time...

In the American context, the most ironical thing about Negro anti-Semitism is that the Negro is really condemning the Jew for having become an American white man--for having become, in effect, a Christian. The Jew profits from his status in America, and he must expect Negroes to distrust him for it. The Jew does not realize that the credential he offers, the fact that he has been despised and slaughtered, does not increase the Negro's understanding. It increases the Negro's rage.

For it is not here, and not now, that the Jew is being slaughtered, and he is never despised, here, as the Negro is, *because* he is an American. The Jewish travail occurred across the sea and America rescued him from the house of bondage. But America *is* the house of bondage for the Negro, and no country can rescue him. What happens to the Negro here happens to him *because* he is an American...

If one blames the Jew for not having been ennobled by oppression, one is not indicting the single figure of the Jew but the entire human race, and one is also making a quite breathtaking claim for oneself. I know that my own oppression did not ennoble me, not even when I thought of myself as a practicing Christian. I also know that if today I refuse to hate Jews, or anybody else, it is because I know how it feels to be hated. I learned this from Christians, and I ceased to practice what the Christians practiced.

The crisis taking place in the world, and in the minds and hearts of black men everywhere, is not produced by the star of David, but by the old, rugged Roman cross on which Christendom's most celebrated Jew was murdered. And not by Jews.

**10. David Biale, *Power and Powerlessness in Jewish History*, 1986, pp. 177–8**

It has been argued that the American Jewish community is at once the freest and the most powerful Diaspora community in Jewish history. Today, this community has access to the highest corridors of power and possesses considerable ability to influence, if not always decisively, the government of the United States in favor of Jewish interests, especially in support of the state of Israel. It is a community with extensive financial resources which it contributes generously to Israel and other foreign Jewish communities, as well as to numerous political and cultural causes in America. Although anti-semitism still exists in American society, there has never been a Diaspora community in modern times that has faced less discrimination. Jews no longer encounter significant economic or occupational barriers, and there are far fewer social barriers than in any Diaspora community in history. Never has a Jewish community of such a size been so well integrated into the life of a non-Jewish society...

If power means, as I have previously defined it, “the ability of a people to control its relations to other peoples as well as its own internal political, cultural, religious, economic and social life” (p. 7), the American-Jewish community is a very powerful community indeed, but not without qualification. I suggested further that power is a measure of the “exercise [of] strength and authority within a collective framework, informed by conscious political goals” (p. 7). The integration of Jews into American society has enhanced their power as individuals, but frequently at the expense of communal cohesiveness. The very success of American Jews in entering the power structure in America has therefore both strengthened and weakened their ability - and desire - to act as a collective in the historical sense of the word. These new and, for the most part, unprecedented circumstances suggest that it may be necessary to revise old definitions of power in favor of new ones still in the making.



#### IV. What is Good – Now – for American Jews?

11. *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette*, November 2, 2018



12. Jewish sign for Black Lives Matter movement, June 1, 2020,  
<https://urj.org/justiceforall>



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